

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 SY-05 GSA-02 MCT-02 DODE-00 PA-01
ICA-11 SP-02 HA-05 /062 W
-----002126 080711Z /14

R 071504Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 420
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL KADUNA

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS:PGOV, ELAB, NI, GW
SUBJECT: RIOT CLOSES LAGOS VOLKSWAGEN PLANT

1. VOLKSWAGEN (VW) OF NIGERIA'S LAGOS AUTOMOBILE
ASSEMBLY PLANT HAS BEEN SHUT DOWN INDEFINITELY IN THE
AFTERMATH OF A RIOT WHICH EXTENSIVELY DAMAGED PLANT
PROPERTY AND INJURED SEVERAL MANAGERS INCLUDING SOME
GERMANS. THE RAMPAGE BY DISSATISFIED WORKERS FOLLOWS
A LONG PERIOD OF LABOR UNREST INCLUDING CONFLICTS OVER WORK
RULES AND CONDITIONS WHICH CULMINATED IN THE RECENT
FIRING OF UNION PRESIDENT ALIU AKINWUNMI.

2. ACCORDING TO A PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY VW (NIGERIA)
PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGER CLARLES IGOH:

"THE FACTORY WILL REMAIN CLOSED UNTIL CONDITIONS
PERMIT ITS RE-OPENING, HOPEFULLY, VERY SOON.

--IN THE DISTURBANCES WHICH STARTED EARLY THIS
MORNING, THE WORKERS BEAT UP SEVERAL MEMBERS
OF MANAGEMENT STAFF, NIGERIANS AND EXPATRIATES,
AND SMASHED, AT LEAST, FIVE VEHICLES, BROKE
INTO AND RANSACKED THE OFFICES IN THE ADMINIS-

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TRATIVE BLOCK, INCLUDING THE OFFICE OF THE
MANAGING DIRECTOR.
--OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS THE LEADERS OF THE
DISSOLVED WORKERS UNION (OFFICIALLY DISSOLVED
BY THE TRADE UNION DECREE) HAVE ENGAGED IN
ACTIVITIES PREJUDICIAL TO THE ORDERLY CONDUCT
OF THE COMPANY'S BUSINESS, INCLUDING PHYSICAL

ATTACKS ON MANAGEMENT AND OTHER STAFF.

--THEREFORE, TO MAINTAIN THE SAFETY OF PERSONNEL AND SECURITY OF PLANT EQUIPMENT AND INVESTMENT, THE COMPANY HAS NO OTHER CHOICE THAN TO TAKE IMMEDIATE AND FIRM ACTION IN PREVENTING THE CONTINUED PRESENCE IN THE FACTORY PREMISES OF THE INSTIGATIONS OF THESE ATTACKS.

--AS A SECURITY MEASURE THE COMPANY THIS MORNING, WAS FORCED TO INVITE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENTS INTO THE FACTORY PREMISES TO PREVENT FURTHER THREAT TO LIVES AND PROPERTY."

3. PRESS REPORTS OF THE INCIDENT SAY THAT RIOTING WORKERS OVERWHELMED THE COMPANY'S SECURITY FORCE AND "FOR HOURS, SMASHED CARS ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE AND DESTROYED COMPANY OFFICES. DAILY TIMES REPORTS, "TOP MEN, AMONG THEM EUROPEANS, WERE ALLEGED STRIPPED AND BEATEN, AND THEN FORCED TO RAISE THEIR ARMS IN SURRENDER."

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4. COMMENT: OUR SOURCES AT THE FRG EMBASSY HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY ARE STILL AWAITING A FULL REPORT ON THE RIOT BUT AT THE MOMENT THEY ARE NOT OVERLY CONCERNED. VW (NIGERIA) HAS A DIFFICULT HISTORY WITH PROBLEMS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RANGING FROM QUALITY CONTROL TO LABOR UNREST. EMBASSY OFFICIALS SAY THAT, AT THE LEAST, THE WORST VIOLENCE WAS INFLICTED ON NIGERIAN MANAGERS AND NOT ON EXPATRIATES. WHILE ADMITTING THAT WORKING CONDITIONS AT THE PLANT ARE BAD, THEY NOTE THAT MAJORITY CONTROL IS IN NIGERIAN HANDS, INCLUDING THE GOVERNMENT, AND THERE IS LITTLE THE PARENT COMPANY CAN DO TO INFLUENCE EVENTS. THERE IS ALSO A GENERAL FEELING THAT, AS THE RESTRICTIONS ON TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES ARE REDUCED IN LINE WITH THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE IN 1979, LABOR UNREST, EVEN OF THIS EXTREME VARIETY, CAN BE EXPECTED TO INCREASE IN NIGERIA. LEWIS

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